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REPORT

OF A

Committee of the Town of Groton,

APPOINTED IN NOVEMBER, 1855, TO CONSIDER
THE EXPEDIENCY OF ESTABLISHING

A

HIGH SCHOOL.

PRINTED BY THE AUTHORITY OF THE TOWN.

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GEO. S BOUTWELL,
DAVID FOSDICK, JR.,
S. C. WHEELER,
WALTER SHATTUCK,
P. G. PRESCOTT,
H. P. ROSS,
JOSIAH BIGELOW,
WILLARD TORREY,
CRAWFORD NIGHTINGALE,

COMMITTEE.

REPORT.

The Committee appointed by the town in November, 1855, to consider the expediency of establishing a High School, have attended to that duty, and respectfully

REPORT:

The laws of the Commonwealth require every town containing five hundred families or householders to maintain a school or schools, in which, in addition to the branches of learning usually taught, instruction shall be given by competent teachers, in the history of the United States, book-keeping, surveying, geometry, and algebra. Such schools are to be kept for the benefit of all the inhabitants of the town, ten months at least in each year, exclusive of vacations, under a penalty, in case of neglect, of forfeiting a sum equal to twice the highest sum which has ever before been voted for the support of schools.

Groton now contains five hundred and seventy families; and as these provisions of law are consequently applicable to us, we might very properly refer to them as conclusive in regard to the duty of the town.

But the law itself had its origin, no doubt, in wise and mature views of public policy. It is desirable to compre-

hend the nature and value of these views, and there may be also special reasons why Groton should cheerfully and vigorously conform in her practice to the general policy of the State. The Massachusetts system of instruction rests upon the idea that the education of the whole people is a matter of public concern. It does not seem to be necessary to sustain this idea by argument; but it may be well to remark, that there is no middle ground between the education of all and the neglect of all. No process of reasoning can prove that it is the duty of the public to educate a part of the children, while the education of another part, however unimportant in numbers, is neglected. The education of the people is a public duty in its full extent, or it is not a public duty at all. To what point this education is to be carried is not so easily ascertained, and great differences of opinion, no doubt, exist. It seems, however, safe to assume, that a system of public instruction should embrace those studies which furnish a fit preparation for the ordinary business of life.

If the system be more limited than this, or if it shall contemplate a result less elevated, we have a plan without a purpose,—a scheme merely, which looks to no definite end. Good farmers, good artisans, good citizens, are in every point of view public benefactors; and why should not the public furnish the means of a thorough elementary instruction?

The welfare of society requires as much, at least, as this. All its pecuniary interests are intimately connected with the intelligence of the producing classes; and learning yields blessings more desirable even than these, though not so readily appreciated by the ordinary standards of value. Intelligence affords great security,—how much we cannot say,—for the principles of morality and religion. Intelligence

is the product of education ; of the education of the school generally, though sometimes of the closet, the shop, or the world. Intelligent communities are usually prosperous, while general poverty is usually associated with general ignorance. Every man has a special interest in the results of his own industry ; but the interest of the public is hardly less important. The learned and wealthy cannot escape the influences of ignorance and poverty, any more than the rich and provident can avoid the calamities incident to a famine or a state of siege. Ignorance degrades all classes,—intelligence elevates all classes. The profits of the laborer, however humble he may be, are very much in proportion to his intelligence ; and the aggregate accumulations of a State or country are in exact ratio to the productiveness of its labor. Our view then is, that if we regard only the pecuniary interests of the public, they will be promoted by a liberal and elevated system of public instruction.

In addition to the provisions of law to which we have referred, towns containing four thousand inhabitants are required to employ a master, who shall be competent to instruct in the Latin and Greek languages, general history, rhetoric, and logic. This provision indicates the limit to which our system of public instruction has been carried. It is not to be understood that we are required to go to this limit, unless the judgment of the town shall demand it ; but it may be well to show that if we do what we are by law required to do, we yet stop short of the grand result contemplated by the legislature.

It is of course perceived, that the legal liability of the several towns of the Commonwealth is not the same, but is dependent upon their population. This could not be avoided ; but the fact that some towns are not required to support a

High School, is no reason why those towns having the requisite population, from which it is inferred that they have the requisite amount of wealth, should not cheerfully comply with the law. Nor does the exemption of the smaller towns from the duty affect in any degree the principle to which the larger towns are subject. The principle is, indeed, universal; its application is necessarily arbitrary. A town containing only a hundred families and a corresponding amount of property, can not, without great hardship, support a Latin school; yet this fact furnishes no excuse for the indifference or neglect of a town of four thousand inhabitants. Heretofore this town has been required to maintain primary or district schools only. This duty we have performed; and now, in consequence of an increase in population, it is equally our duty to maintain a school of a higher order. Shall this duty be performed also? It certainly ought to be, if the general policy of the State is based upon sound and sufficient reasons and principles, unless, indeed, some special cause can be suggested why this general policy should not be applied to us. We know of no such cause. Education is as important to our sons and daughters as to the rising generation of other sections.

We are as much interested as any in the intelligence, and prosperity, and honor of Massachusetts. On the other hand, there seem to be peculiar circumstances which should lead the citizens of Groton to establish and maintain a High School.

Our public schools are not only defective, but they are relatively quite inferior to the schools of many, if not most of the towns of the Commonwealth. It may not be easy to specify all the causes which contribute to produce this inferiority; but there is one so prominent and so powerful that we

feel called upon to mention it. We speak of the Academy. This institution is now more than half a century old, is liberally endowed, and it naturally exerts a decided influence upon the cause of education among us. Regarding the entire period of its existence, there is no doubt that its influence has been beneficial; and yet we are not prepared to admit that the Academy, as at present constituted, is fitted for the work which the public wish to have done. Some members of your Committee desired to effect a union by which the academy should, for all local purposes, become a High School. This subject has not been formally presented to the trustees; but the views of individual members have been so far ascertained by conversation and correspondence, as to lead the Committee unanimously to the opinion, that the project for a union of the academy with the public system must be abandoned. It may be proper for us to say that the trustees entertain the hope of so elevating and changing the character of the Academy as to leave the field which properly belongs to a High School in a great degree, if not entirely, unoccupied. Under these circumstances it well becomes us to inquire whether things ought to remain as they are, or whether a High School should be established for the benefit of the whole population. To a limited portion of the people the Academy may be a substitute for a High School; and this fact renders the establishment and maintenance of the latter a work of unusual difficulty.

Indeed it is quite probable that had there been no means of education but such as our district schools furnish, the actual existence of a High School would render the present consideration of its expediency unnecessary.

Persons who have the means of educating their children at the Academy, however friendly they may be to the cause

of education, do not feel the necessity for elevating our public schools as they would were these schools their only hope. We do not mean to say that such persons are indifferent to the common welfare ; but all men naturally feel most sensibly the burdens which they themselves bear. A child is sent to the district school for a few years, and then transferred to the Academy. The burden may not be great, and the father may not even consider whether the same benefits are accessible to all, and if not, whether the system that he enjoys is not an exclusive system, and therefore totally inadequate to meet the wants of the people. And we may properly inquire, Would these parents be satisfied with the district schools as they are, were there no Academy ? We assume that they would not be satisfied, and that the influence of this large class of citizens in behalf of general education is materially diminished. And is it not plain also, that the children of those who, from poverty or any other cause, fail to patronize the academy, suffer from the existing state of things ? And are not these individual and family losses the items which, in their aggregation, constitute a great public loss ? And do we not, in this state of sentiment, lose sight of the doctrine of equality as it ought everywhere to exist, and as it was most beautifully expressed upon the records of the town of Dorchester, in 1639, when the inhabitants declared “ that the teacher should receive all who were sent unto him and give them equal instruction, whether they be the children of the rich or the children of the poor ? ” This, indeed, is the true idea of a system of education ; and yet, it is an idea which, as a town, we have failed to realize. The cause of this failure is apparent. We need a High School which shall be as an Academy for all. Having such a High School, and admitting pupils only after a thorough and

impartial examination, we should find that our system as a whole had been materially improved.

Whoever looks at the High School with reference only to the character and amount of instruction given in it, fails to see the whole influence of the institution. If pupils are admitted to the High School when they arrive at a specified age, then indeed the progress made does not correspond to the effort; but if the examination of which we have spoken is required, a strong motive is applied to the teachers and pupils, and to the friends of the teachers and pupils, in all the schools below. The object of the pupil is to qualify himself for the High School, and in this object he will be aided and encouraged by his teachers and parents. As a consequence, we present new and higher motives in the primary and district schools, and with higher motives we secure better results. Now, however, the influence of the Academy is adverse to these ideas of elevation and progress. Pupils are there admitted upon a very slight examination, and often, as it is understood, without any examination at all. Of this we make no complaint, for the Academy is not a part of the public system, nor responsible to it; and we only present the fact to show that the child in the district school has no motive to prepare for the change, inasmuch as the change is to come in the progress of time, as a matter of course, or it is not to come at all. In either case, we lose in our schools the animating influence of a motive which is all-powerful in the colleges, in the professions, and in the active pursuits of life. More than this. Pupils are often transferred without proper qualifications, and as a consequence, the district schools are weakened by the absence of those who ought to be in them, and the Academy is degraded by the presence of pupils not qualified for the places they

occupy. Another result of the operations of this inharmonious system is, that pupils fail to acquire the knowledge which ought to be given, and can only be given in the primary and district schools; and then as a consequence, fail to realize and enjoy the advantages which the academy, under favorable circumstances, could easily confer.

Nor is this all. Pupils, from the pressure of poverty, or from other circumstances, are sometimes kept in the district schools after their classmates and companions have been admitted to the academy. This distinction generally occurs at a period when the youthful feelings are peculiarly sensitive, and impressions are sometimes made which remain through life. The true rule of the school requires a division of the pupils according to merit and attainments; but with us they are separated by factitious circumstances. These remarks are not made because they are specially applicable to this town; but being applicable, they are of special importance to us. Nor would we be understood as inclined to complain of the existence or government of the Academy; and we have alluded to it only for the purpose of showing that it does not secure the result which the friends of the public system seek. As citizens, we ought to favor the establishment of a High School, precisely as we should were there no endowed seminary among us, at which a part of the youth of the town may be educated. We seek an elevated system of public instruction; and this we ought to secure without reference to the other educational advantages which exist among us. But is it possible to elevate our schools without some radical change?

The Academy, from the fact of its location, is connected with the public system, but yet is no part of it. Do we not, then, need a High School, as the complement of our

plan, which shall be valuable in itself,—giving equal instruction with the Academy to all the youth of the town, and yet more valuable in its influence upon the primary and district schools? And it seems necessary, if we establish a High School, to so endow it with teachers and apparatus as to satisfy every just expectation of the people. If we set up a school whose character does not answer to its name, it will soon be found that we have burdened ourselves with taxes, and yet have accomplished nothing. The school should be so good that every parent and pupil in town will accept it according to its professions and claims. This being accomplished, we have nothing to fear; this being neglected, all our labor will have been in vain.

But the expense of building a house, furnishing apparatus, and supporting competent teachers, must not be overlooked. Education is expensive; expensive to the individual,—expensive to the community; but it yields large returns. Massachusetts has been well remunerated for the cost of her educational system.

Nor can it be said that it is the rich alone, or the poor alone, on whom the blessings of learning fall. It elevates, refines, protects, all classes. By the diffusion of knowledge, the luxuries of the last generation, enjoyed by the wealthy only, minister in this age, to the daily necessities, convenience and comfort of society generally. Learning equalizes the condition of men. Not, indeed, by making the rich poor, but by continually improving the condition of those members of society who, if kept in ignorance, could hardly escape from poverty. Learning in itself, and in its connections with morality and religion, promotes the public virtue. The man of wealth is eminently exposed to pecuniary loss from the conduct of the vicious and criminal. His property is in a great

degree at the mercy of the community in which his lot is cast. But public virtue is a blessing to men of all conditions ; and it is better to secure it by general learning than to restrain and punish vice by penal codes and prisons. Indeed, codes and prisons are, at best, poor substitutes for schools, and we ought not, as a state or nation, to expect security for person and property while we withhold our contributions to the cause of learning. Public burdens cannot be avoided. If we will not found schools, employ teachers, and educate children in knowledge and virtue, we must at least build hospitals, asylums and prisons, and guard ourselves by laws and police against the crimes of degraded men. It is no doubt possible for one generation to relieve itself by laying a portion of its own proper burdens upon the future ; and though individuals may sometimes be successfully tempted to do this, the state, as a whole, or in its parts, ought never to yield. The individual, being mortal, may not personally suffer from the results of his own policy, manifested in the deterioration of public intelligence and virtue ; but the state, as a whole, or in its parts, cannot thus escape, for it is immortal. But it is not by any means to be admitted that each generation does not secure for itself ample pecuniary returns for all its expenditures in the cause of learning.

Assume that Massachusetts expends two millions annually for the support of schools, and imagine this appropriation neglected for thirty years, and a saving of sixty millions of dollars thereby effected, and is it not probable that this vast sum would be set off by the reduced value of real estate alone, to say nothing of the diminished productiveness of labor or the increase of pauperism and crime ?

It cannot of course be asserted that the pecuniary returns

will be to every man in proportion to his contributions. This is not required by the recognized principles of taxation. Such a doctrine would leave society without the means of providing for its own defence, and render it utterly incapable of progress. The right of taxation, as it exists in the power, depends upon the principle that in many instances the interest of the public is paramount to the interest of any individual.

All are compelled to support carriage roads and bridges, though some may always travel on foot; and the rich cannot escape the taxes which pauperism imposes, though they and theirs are free from want. It is both a duty and a virtue to aid the cause of education, though no specific, pecuniary return may come to us. As citizens, we continually reap where we have not sown; and it is our duty to transmit privileges and blessings to others, as some compensation for those which we, by inheritance, now enjoy.

One great fact in the way of establishing a High School is the territorial extent of the town. It will be hardly practicable for persons living in remote parts,—especially in the eastern and south-eastern districts,—to attend the High School, whatever its location may be. This is a misfortune, and beyond the reach of any remedy; but the question returns, Shall the great majority of the town be deprived of the benefits of this system because they are comparatively valueless to the minority?

If so, then indeed, upon the same principle, our present system is indefensible, being in some degree unequal. It appears, however, upon an examination, that the number of families to which the school would be inaccessible is not large. We assume that persons within two miles of the school are not at an unreasonable distance; but in this

assumption we do not mean to admit that pupils might not, under some circumstances, travel two and a half or even three miles, for a portion of the year at least. This is now done by the attendants upon the Academy. We assume further, that those who reside within half a mile of the depot at Groton Junction or of the depot at Babbittasset, will be reasonably accommodated, inasmuch as they may pass to and from these depots to the station at Groton Centre in a brief period of time, and at a small cost. Proceeding upon these assumptions, we find that three hundred and ninety-seven families will be within a reasonable distance of the school; sixty-four families more will be between two and three miles from it, while one hundred and nine families only will remain who will be deprived entirely of the direct benefits of the institution. We say that these latter will be deprived of the *direct* benefits of the High School, because we cannot admit that they will not enjoy, in common with their fellow-citizens generally, the advantages which will proceed from an improved system of public instruction.

And we say further, that justice seems to require, in case a High School shall be established, such a distribution of the school money among the several portions of the town as will secure to the remote sections an equality, so far as may be, of educational privileges.

It is not clear from the vote of the town, that the Committee were charged with the duty of considering the plan or cost of a school-house, and they have therefore given but little attention to the subject. The inquiries that have been made justify the opinion that the sum of five thousand dollars will be ample. This sum, assessed upon property alone, will be equal to three dollars and sixty cents upon every thousand.

Of course, the cost of a building may in a great degree be controlled by the views of the town. Your Committee are of opinion that a house need not be expensive, as compared with many which have been erected in the State. It should be neat and tasteful in architectural appearance, sufficiently capacious, well ventilated, warmed, and furnished with seats and apparatus ; but it does not seem to be necessary to expend a large sum of money for the purchase of a site or in mere ornament. It should be accessible and convenient for educational purposes. These are the leading objects, and to them all others should conform.

Under the circumstances and in view of the considerations which have been presented, your committee unanimously recommend the establishment of a High School.

For the Committee,

GEO. S. BOUTWELL.

GROTON, March 3d, 1856.

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